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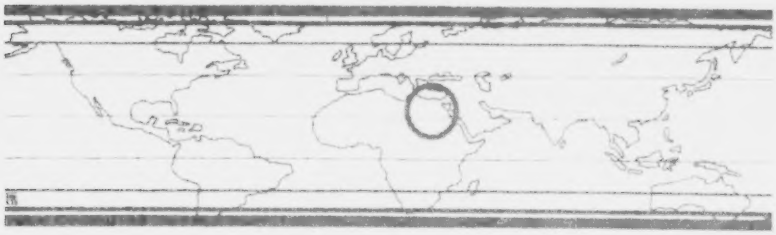

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MAUSOLEUM OF MAMLUK EMIR KABIR QURQUMAS IN CAIRO

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It seems reasonable to begin with an introduction of one of the most fascinating chapters of Egyptian history in order to explain who Qurqumas was and why he deserved a mausoleum.

Mamluks

The sultan As-Salih Ayyub, ruled Egypt between A.D. 1240 and 1249, setting the stage for a major period of Egyptian history, the era of the *Mamluks*. He was a descendant of the famous Saladin, founder of the Kurdish dynasty of Ayyubids, better known as the archenemy of the Crusaders.

The *Mamluks* (literally meaning "owned by another") were slaves taken at a very young age and trained in the arts of war. Upon reaching adulthood, they were freed, issued a horse and weapons, and admitted into the service of an *emir* ("commander"), usually their former owner, whom, almost without exception, they served until the end of their lives with intense loyalty and commitment.

Their main contingent was based in barracks on the Nile River island of Rhoda, and hence was named: Bahri Mamluks (*al-bahr*, Arabic for river). They were recruited mainly from the Kipchak Turks and Kurds.

Isometric view of the mausoleum/funerary complex showing, L to R: the *khankhah*, minaret, *madrasa*, mosque and *qasr*. The *tahuna* and *hawsh* are in front of the *khankhah* and *qasr*, respectively.

The first *atabeg* ("commander-in-chief") of this army was a Mamluk named Baybars, later a sultan himself (1260-1277), who was followed by generations of other former slaves turned rulers.

In 1382, the Bahris were displaced by a competing junta known as Burji Mamluks. The Burji Mamluks were based in the Cairo Citadel (*al-burj*). The Burjis were recruited from Circassian slaves whose origins and fortunes were very much similar to those of the

Bahris. Their turbulent reign, terminated by the Ottoman conquest, was characterized by numerous outbreaks of epidemics, and public unrest. This unrest was mainly due to heavy taxation levied to make up for revenue losses incurred by a poor economy. This was caused by gradual exclusion from the monopoly in the Indian and Far Eastern goods market by Portugal which was now trading via a new maritime route to India and beyond.

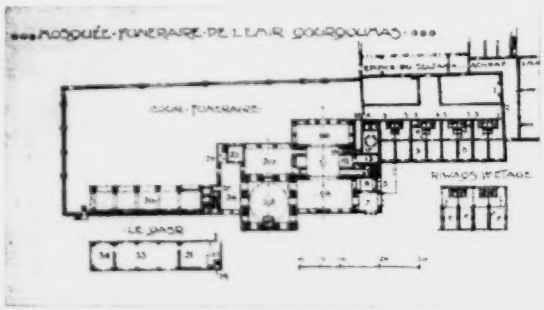
The Mamluk dominion can be described as a military meritocracy. Created in the mid-13th century A.D. its sultans took control over Egypt and Syria, and expanded in the 14th century to coastal regions of the Arabian Peninsula. In 1517, the Mamluks lost sovereignty to Ottoman Sultan Selim (1512-1520), father of famous Suleyman the Magnificent. However, the military traditions of the Mamluks were revived by Napoleon during his Egyptian campaign in the late 18th century.

Qurqumas

Qurqumas was primarily a Mamluk of the Sultan Qaytbay. After Qaytbay's death, Qurqumas served for six other sultans and was consistently raised in rank. Under Sultan al-Ghuri, he became *emir* and *atabeg* of the armies, the rank he held until his death. Sultan Qansuh al-Ghuri admired Qurqumas for his benevolence, integrity and modesty and it is said that when he died at 60 years of age in 1510, the whole of Cairo went into mourning.

Emir Kabir Qurqumas built his mausoleum in 1506-1507. Under Islamic law, a Muslim may set up a charitable endowment called a *waqf*. The building of a mausoleum complex counted as a *waqf* as it served wider public functions, such as education. *Waqfs*, and the good works they supported, were vital to Muslim society before the establishment of modern Islamic states.

Qurqumas' mausoleum was patterned after the mausoleum of Sultan Qaytbay, his first mentor. It was made up of two main components. The first component consisted of the donor's residence and buildings associated with religious observance: *qasr* (the residence used by the owner and his family during occasional visits to the funerary complex) and mosque, *madrasa* (school), minaret, and ablution courts; while the second component contained a complex of private domestic structures: the *khankhah* (2-storey dwelling units with a latrine on both floors of each unit but no kitchens) for resident holy men (*Sufis*), and a maintenance annex of kitchens, storehouses, wells, and stables called a *tahuna*.



Plan view of the mausoleum complex.

The excavation

In 1999, I was approached by my former colleagues to join, on behalf of the ROM, a partnership with the University of Warsaw's Polish Centre of Archaeology in Cairo, and with the Supreme Council for Antiquities of Egypt (SCAE). The project, designed to excavate the structures in advance of restoration of the funerary complex, was sponsored by the ROM Foundation and by the Department of Near Eastern and Asian Civilizations (NEAC). The project was initiated by NEAC in May 1999 while I was appointed the archaeological consultant to the SCAE. The 6-week long field season opened in early May 2000.

The work began with the examination and documentation of local and imported pottery sherds found in the household quarters of the mausoleum, and dating from the second half of the 16th century to the 17th century A.D. The collection of sherds from the *tahuna* complex had been assembled during several seasons of excavations preceding the restoration work in 2000. This work was conducted for many years under the supervision of George Kania and M. Witkowski from the University of Warsaw's Polish Centre of Archaeology in Cairo.

The study confirmed beyond any doubt that the mausoleum complex of Emir Qurqumas, especially the *khankhah* inhabited by the Sufis, was finished and used long after the death of the *emir* in 1516. Archaeological data confirm a possible symbiosis with the household run by the Sufis from the *khankhah* in the neighbouring Sultan Ashraf Inal funerary complex. There is no evidence of an early presence in the area of Ottoman Turks who invaded Egypt in 1517.

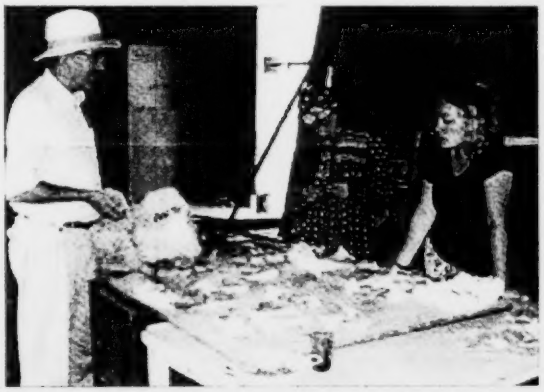
The kitchen establishment, mentioned after 1540, and presumably used by the Sufis, was located in the vicinity of the *tahuna*. This can be deduced from a large concentration of a uniform (if not standardized) group of cooking vessels found there. These include numerous small, shallow frying pans, and countless discarded sherds bearing traces of cooking and burning. However, meals may only have been reheated here and not actually cooked.

Generally, the people of Medieval Cairo did not prepare their meals at home but rather bought them already cooked from specialized caterers who were found around the city. It has been said that, during this period, there were from ten to twelve thousand cooks who wandered up and down the streets of the city, carrying lighted braziers on their heads with bubbling pots of stews or meats roasting on spits, calling out to those around them, advertising their simmering wares. The very real danger of houses catching fire from individual cooking fires was thus diminished by these entrepreneurs.

The mausoleum, apart from a strictly religious role as a mosque and *madrasa,* was built as a burial place for the *emir*, and all his descendants, who were, needless to say, affluent members of Cairan society. As mentioned earlier, in addition to the religious structures, a suite of domestic buildings was erected: the donor's temporary residence (*qasr*) and the accommodation (*khankhah*) for people maintaining and guarding the site, servicing the stables, and, as noted above, perhaps preparing meals.

At the time of the funeral, the relatives and other attendants arrived to participate in the ceremony usually lasting several days. The relatives were accommodated in the *qasr*. As affluent members of society, they were most likely the users of the luxury ware found in the excavations.

In this context it is easy to explain the contrasting archaeological inventory: fragments of both imported luxury ware and the localized hubs of domestic kitchenware.



The author and colleagues examining sherds in the *qasr*.

The study revealed that fragments of imported ceramics (pieces of Turkish Iznik ware), found in the

upper debris layers, cannot be dated earlier than to the last quarter of he 16th century. Following this was the import of luxury European (French?) faience drinking cups/bowls, fragments of small blue and white Ch'ing porcelain wine (coffee) cups, and their imitations probably manufactured in Turkey (Kutahya).

An interesting and intriguing find was a small coffee (or wine) cup identical to vessels manufactured in the second half of the 16th century in Hays (in Yemen), a town situated half-way between Zabid and al-Mokha (from which we get the word 'mocha' for a type of coffee), a Red Sea port. Large quantities of these cups were excavated in Zabid. This find represents the earliest evidence for coffee consumption in the Ottoman Empire.

The presence of these and other 15th and 16th century Yemeni ceramic imports was confirmed previously in Alexandria. We can now also assume the likelihood of contact between the cities of Zabid and al-Mokha in Yemen with the late Islamic port city of Qusayr al-Qadim (a coffee importing centre) in southern Egypt, on the Red Sea coast.

Future plans include research of the mausoleum of Sultan Ashraf Inal, which abuts that of Qurqumas, to facilitate the preparation of restoration work on the former. The research would involve excavation of foundations and possibly of compartments of the mausoleum finished in the last two to three decades of the 15th century. Both mausoleums are located on the grounds of a third sanctuary, the *hawsh* (cemetery) of Emir Jirbash Qashiq al-Karimi, mentioned in AD 1456.

Ceramic vessels from the Qurqumas Mausoleum funerary complex.

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